

The Secretary
The Senate Committee
Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services
31.08.2011

Dear Dr Holland,

Re: Senate Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services in
Melbourne on 19th August

Once again, we are most grateful for the interest of the Committee in the issues raised by the terms of reference of the Inquiry. I am writing on this occasion to ensure that the Committee is aware of some factual errors and misunderstanding evident in the statements of Mr Stevenson and Ms Northey of the Australian Association of Psychologists incorporated (AAPi) at the Hearing for the Senate Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services in Melbourne on 19th August. These errors were clearly not intended to misrepresent the facts, but were erroneous, nevertheless.

Mr Stevenson repeatedly refers to post-graduate training in the psychology speciality areas as 'generalist' training. This is not the case. Each post-graduate program has a separate focus and curriculum oriented towards a specific specialised area of psychology with international recognition. While accreditation standards (Australian Psychology Accreditation Council: <http://www.apac.psychology.org.au/Courses.aspx?ID=2211>) are similar for all post-graduate professional training, course content differs significantly by speciality area and these areas are recognised as separate as areas of endorsement by the Psychology Board of Australia.

Mr Stevenson also refers to post-graduate training as being of an 'academic' and 'coursework' nature and appears to believe it includes no 'practitionership.' This is erroneous. For example, a Masters degree in clinical psychology comprises 1/3 academic coursework, 1/3 research and 1/3 supervised placements, commencing with a period of very intense supervision of work with patients within a university training clinic followed by at least 3 further supervised placements in clinical settings, such as hospitals and Community Mental Health external to the university. This needs to consist of a total of 1,000 hours of practicum. A professional Doctoral program consists of the Masters requirements plus an additional 500 hours of supervised practicum experience, often tied to their area of research. The larger research project undertaken by Doctoral students enables the student to contribute significantly to the literature and become expert in their chosen research area.

Mr Stevenson states, "The speciality exists in Western Australia only as an in-house APS [Australian Psychological Society] speciality". This is not at all the case. Specialist Title was held in Western Australia by those with post-graduate speciality training at Masters or Doctoral level for 35 years,

but this was discontinued under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (WA) Act in October, 2010). This system was governed by the Psychologists Registration Board of Western Australia and had nothing to do with the Australian Psychological Society (APS) at all.

Furthermore, Ms Northey states that “All registered psychologists have completed a fourth postgraduate year in addition to two years of supervised practice”. This is not correct. A psychologist is required to have completed an accredited, four-year sequence of study (or its equivalent) in psychology (<http://www.psychologyboard.gov.au/>). A three year undergraduate degree is commonly followed by an undergraduate Honours year in psychology, but may be undertaken as a post-graduate Diploma in psychology at some universities. This standard has not changed with the implementation of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law.

Finally, in the written statement of the Australian Psychological Society (APS) it states: “The APS has responsibility for setting professional practice standards for psychologists, providing ongoing professional development, and accrediting university psychology training programs across Australia”. This gives the impression that the APS holds regulatory and legal authority in these areas, but this is not the case. The Psychology Board of Australia, in partnership with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Authority (AHPRA), has regulatory authority in terms of professional practice standards (<http://www.psychologyboard.gov.au/>) and the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council (APAC), to which the APS contributes, holds the authority for accrediting university psychology training programs across Australia (<http://www.apac.psychology.org.au/>).

With many thanks for undertaking the enormous workload involved in this Inquiry. I hope it may bring some resolution to our troubled profession and the difficulties in the funding of mental health programs. I can only imagine the enormous size of the task in managing this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Judy Hyde
President, the Australian Clinical Psychology Association (ACPA)
Director, the Psychology Clinic, University of Sydney